



PHALANGISTA VIVERRINA, *Ogilby*

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Viverrine Phalangista.

Phalangista viverrina, Ogilby in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part v. p. 151.—Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 303.
——— *Cooki*, Gunn, Ann. of Nat. Hist., vol. i. 1838, p. 102.

ON reference to the description of the preceding species, *Phalangista Cooki*, will be found some general observations respecting the Ring-tailed Opossums of Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales. A lengthened discussion between Mr. Ogilby and Mr. Gray, as to whether the island or continental animals should be called *Cooki*, will be found in the "Annals of Natural History" for the year 1838, into the merits of which I shall not enter, but merely remark, that my observations of the animals in a state of nature lead me to coincide with Mr. Ogilby, and, for the present at least, to consider the Van Diemen's Land animal as distinct from that of New South Wales, and as the one for which his name of *viverrina* should be retained. I saw much of this animal during my sojourn in the island, and frequently hunted it in company with some of the settlers, and the servants who accompanied me. Like many other species, it evinced a great partiality for certain trees and localities, some districts being resorted to by great numbers, while in others it was almost entirely absent. It may extend its range to the continent, as I have lately seen a dark-coloured specimen which had been obtained in the brushes. The Ring-tailed Opossums procured by Mr. Gilbert in Western Australia, of which I have several examples, are fully equal in size, and even blacker in colour, than the Van Diemen's Land animals; but he did occasionally meet with greyer specimens in the neighbourhood of Perth. I mention this, that mammalogists may form opinions for themselves as to whether these animals constitute one or more species; whether they do or do not, I have considered it advisable to give correct representations of the very opposite colours they exhibit, and to state all I know respecting them.

I found this animal gave a decided preference to those districts of Van Diemen's Land that are of a sandy character, and where the large gum-trees were sparingly dispersed, such as the islands on the River Derwent and the plains on the northern side of that stream; but it was not to be found in the more dense and humid scrub of its opposite shore. Our usual mode of hunting this animal was to go out in a small party on moonlight nights, when, with the aid of one or two small cur dogs, it was soon discovered, either on the ground or among the branches of the trees, where, if looked for with the face towards the moon, it is not difficult to see, and when seen, much less difficult to shoot, as it never attempts to retreat.

Mr. Gunn states that this animal "is common near Launceston, and is there usually called Ring-tail Opossum as a specific name. All the opossums come out of the holes of the trees, in which they usually sleep all day, about twilight; and for about an hour or two after sunset they may be seen busily employed eating the leaves of the various species of *Eucalypti*; on the branches in moonlight nights they are usually shot, and opossum-shooting is sometimes fine sport where a few join together. Orchards in country places suffer sometimes from the opossums eating all the leaves and young branches."

Mr. Gilbert says this animal is called *Ngö-ra* by the aborigines of Perth, and *Ngork* by those of King George's Sound; and states that "it does not confine itself to the hollows of trees, but is often found in holes in the ground, where the entrance is covered with a stump, and from which it is often hunted out by the Kangaroo dogs. It varies very much in the colour of the fur, from a very light grey to nearly black. In one instance I caught a pair in the same hole exhibiting these extremes of colour."

At page 303 of Mr. Waterhouse's "Natural History of the Mammalia," he mentions that there are five specimens from Van Diemen's Land in the British Museum, in which the general hue of the fur is pale rufous-grey on the back, and bright rust-colour on the sides of the body and limbs; this statement induced me carefully to examine these specimens, and I feel confident that, by some accident, the labels they originally bore have been lost, probably during the process of mounting; and that they are from New South Wales, and not from Van Diemen's Land.

The following is the description of a specimen from Van Diemen's Land sent to me by R. C. Gunn, Esq. :—

Fur of the head, all the upper surface of the body, the outer side of the limbs, and basal half of the tail, sooty-grey, grizzled with whitish, and with numerous interspersed long black hairs; sides of the face and

orbits dusky ; posterior part of the exterior of the ear, and a patch behind and below it, white ; throat, chest, abdomen, inner side of the limbs and apical half of the tail white ; moustaches black.

Other examples from that island have the upper surface very much darker.

Specimens from Swan River are still darker, not only on the upper but on the under surface, which latter is of a brownish-grey only a trifle lighter than the hue of the upper parts. The colour of one example now before me is almost wholly black, somewhat paler beneath, and with a small patch of white on the chest, and an interrupted line of white down the throat and abdomen. The colouring, in fact, is much varied between grey and black, but never exhibits the rufous hue of the New South Wales animal, *Phalangista Cooki*.

The figures are somewhat less than the natural size.